The PRINCESS ELOPES

By HAROLD MAC GRATH

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I beheld two faces in profile

IT is rather difficult in these days for a man who takes such scant interest in foreign affairs—trust a whilom diplomat for that!—to follow the continual geographical disturbances of European surfaces. Thus, I cannot distinctly recall the exact location of the Grand Duchy of Barscheit or of the neighboring principality of Doppelkinn. It meets my needs and purposes, however, to say that Berlin and Vienna were easily accessible, and that a three hours' journey would bring you under the shadow of the Carpathian Range, where, in my diplomatic days, I used often to hunt the "bear that walks like a man."

Barscheit was known among her sister states as "the meddler," the "maker of trouble," and the duke as "Old Grumpy"—Brummbar. To use a familiar Yankee expression, Barscheit had a finger in every pie. Whenever there was a political broth making, whether in Italy, Germany, or Austria, Barscheit would snatch up a ladle and start in. She took care of her own affairs so easily that she had plenty of time to concern herself with the affairs of her neighbors. This is not to advance the opinion that Barscheit was wholly modern; far from it. The fault of Barscheit may be traced back to a certain historical pillar of salt, easily recalled by all those who attended Sunday school. "Rubbering" is a vulgar phrase, and I disdain to use it.

When a woman looks around it is invariably a portent of trouble; the man forgets his important engagement, and runs amuck, knocking over people, principles, and principalities. If Aspasia had not observed Pericles that memorable day; if there had not been an oblique slant to Calypso's eyes as Ulysses passed her way; if the eager Delilah had not offered favorable comment on Samson's ringlets; in fact, if all the women in history and romance had gone about their affairs as they should have done, what uninteresting reading history would be today!

Now, this is a story of a woman who looked around, and of a man who did not keep his appointment on time; out of a grain of sand, a mountain. Of course, there might have been other causes, but with these I'm not familiar.

This Duchy of Barscheit is worth looking into. Imagine a country with telegraph and telephone and medieval customs, a country with electric lights, railways, surface cars, hotel elevators, and ancient laws! Something of the customs of the duchy must be told in the passing, though, for my part, I am vigorously against explanatory passages in stories of action. Barscheit bristled with militarism; the little man always imitates the big one, but lacks the big man's excuses. Militarism entered into and overshadowed the civic laws.

There were three things you might do without offense; you might bathe, eat, and sleep, only you must not sleep out loud. The citizen of Barscheit was hemmed in by a set of laws which had their birth in the dark dungeons of the Inquisition. They congealed the blood of a man born and bred in a commercial country. If you broke a law, you were relentlessly punished; there was no mercy. In America we make laws and then hide them in dull-looking volumes which the public have neither the time nor the inclination to read. In this duchy of mine it was different; you ran into a law on every corner, in every park, in every public building; little oblong signs, enameled, which told you that you could not do something or other—"Forbidden!" The beauty of German laws is that when you learn all the things that you cannot do, you begin to find out that the things you can do are not worth a hang in the doing.

As soon as a person learned to read he or she began life by reading these laws. If you could not read, so much the worse for you; you had to pay a guide who charged you almost as much as the full cost of the fine.

The opposition political party in the United States is always howling militarism, without the slightest idea of what militarism really is. One side, please, in Barscheit, when an officer comes along, or take the consequences. If you carelessly bumped into him, you were knocked down. If you objected, you were arrested. If you struck back, ten to one you received a beating with the flat of a saber. And never, never mistake the soldiery for the police; that is to say, never ask an officer to direct you to any place. This is regarded in the light of an insult. The cub-lieutenants do more to keep a passable sidewalk—for the passage of said cub-lieutenants—than all the magistrates put together. How they used to swagger up and down the Konigsstrasse, around the Platz, in and out of the restaurants! I remember doing some sidestepping myself, and I was a diplomat, supposed to be immune from the rank discourtesies of the military. But that was early in my career.

In a year not so remote as not to be readily recalled, the United States packed me off to Barscheit because I had an uncle who was a Senator. Some papers were given me, the permission to hang out a shingle reading "American Consul," and the promise of my board and keep. My amusements were to be paid out of my own pocket. Straightway I purchased three horses, found a capable Japanese valet, and selected a cozy house near the barracks, which stood west of the Volksgarten, on a pretty lake. A beautiful road ran around this body of water, and it wasn't long ere the officers began to pass comments on the riding of "that wild American." As I detest what is known as park-riding, you may very well believe that I circled the lake at a clip which must have opened the eyes of the easy-going officers. I grew quite chummy with a few of them; and I may speak of occasions when I did not step off the sidewalk as they came along. A man does more toward gaining the affection of foreigners by giving a good dinner now and then than by international law. I gained considerable fame by my little dinners at Muller's Rathskeller, under the Continental Hotel.

Six months passed, during which I rode, read, drove, and dined, the actual labors of the consulate being cared for by a German clerk who knew more about the business than I did.

By this you will observe that diplomacy has degenerated into the gentle art of exciting jaded palates and of scribbling one's name across passports; I know of no better definition. I forgot what the largess of my office was.

Presently there were terrible doings. The old reigning grand duke desired peace of mind; and, moving determinedly toward this end, he declared in public that his niece, the young and tender Princess Hildegarde, should wed the Prince of Doppelkinn, whose vineyards gave him a fine income. This was finality; the avuncular guardian had waited long enough for his willful ward to make up her mind as to the selection of a suitable husband; now he determined to take a hand in the matter. And you shall see how well he managed it.

It is scarcely necessary for me to state that her highness had her own ideas of what a husband should be like, gathered, no doubt, from execrable translations from "Ouida" and the gentle Miss Braddon. A girl of twenty usually has a formidable regard for romance, and the princess was fully up to the manner of her kind. If she could not marry romantically, she refused to marry at all.

I can readily appreciate her uncle's perturbation. I do not know how many princelings she thrust into utter darkness. She would never marry a man who wore glasses; this one was too tall, that one too short; and when one happened along who was without visible earmarks or signs of being shopworn, her refusal was based upon just —"Because!"—a weapon as invincible as the fabled spear of Parsifal. She had spurned the addresses of Prince Mischler, laughed at those of the Count of ——-—— (the short dash indicates the presence of a hyphen), and General Muerrisch, of the emperor's body guard, who was, I'm sure, good enough—in his own opinion—for any woman. Every train brought to the capital some suitor with a consonated, hyphenated name and a pedigree as long as a bore's idea of a funny story. But the princess did not care for pedigrees that were squint-eyed or bow-legged. One and all of them she cast aside as unworthy her consideration. Then, like the ancient worm, the duke turned. She should marry Doppelkinn, who, having no wife to do the honors in his castle, was wholly agreeable.

The Prince of Doppelkinn reigned over the neighboring principality. If you stood in the middle of it and were a baseball player, you could throw a stone across the frontier in any direction. But the vineyards were among the finest in Europe. The prince was a widower, and among his own people was affectionately styled "der Rotnasig," which, I believe, designates an illuminated proboscis. When he wasn't fishing for rainbow trout, he was sleeping in his cellars. He was often missing at the monthly reviews, but nobody ever worried; they knew where to find him. And, besides, he might just as well sleep in his cellars as in his carirage, for he never rode a horse if he could get out of doing so. He was really good-natured and easy-going, so long as no one crossed him severely; and you could tell him a joke once and depend upon his understanding it immediately, which is more than I can say for the duke.

Years and years ago the prince had had a son; but at the tender age of three the boy had run away from the castle confines, and no one ever heard of him again. The enemies of the prince whispered among themselves that the boy had run away to escape compulsory military service, but the boy's age precluded this accusation. The prince advertised, after the fashion of those times, sent out detectives and notified his various brothers; but his trouble went for nothing. Not the slightest trace of the boy could be found. So he was mourned for a season, regretted, and then forgotten; the prince adopted the grape-arbor.

I saw the prince once. I do not blame the Princess Hildegarde for her rebellion. The prince was not only old; he was fat and ugly, with little, elephant-like eyes that were aways vein-shot, restless and full of mischief. He might have made a good father, but I have nothing to prove this. Those bottles of sparkling Moselle which he failed to dispose of to the American trade he gave to his brother in Barscheit or drank himself. He was sixty-eight years old.

A nephew, three times removed, was waiting for the day when he should wabble around in the prince's shoes. He was a lieutenant in the duke's body-guard, a quck-tempered, heady chap. Well, he never wabbled around in his uncle's shoes, for he never got the chance.

I hadn't been in Barschiet a week before I heard a great deal about the princess. She was a famous horsewoman. This made me extremely anxious to meet her. Yet for nearly six months I never even got so much as a glimpse of her. Half of the six months she was traveling through Austria, and the other half she kept out of my way—not intentionally; she knew nothing of my existence; simply, fate moved us about blindly. At court she was invariably indisposed, and at the first court ball she retired before I arrived. I got up at all times, galloped over all roads, but never did I see her. She rode alone, too, part of the time.

The one picture of her which I was lucky enough to see had been taken when she was six, and meant nothing to me in the way of identification. For all I knew I might have passed her on the road. She became to be the princess in the invsible cloak, passing me often and doubtless deriding my efforts to discern her. My curiosity became alarming. I couldn't sleep for the thought of her. Finally we met, but the meeting was a great surprise to us both. This

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